DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 127 541 CG 010 769

TITLE Decade for Women: World Plan of Action.
INSTITUTION Women's Equity Action League, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY Rockefeller Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE [Apr 76]
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Interrelationships; Economic Factors; Educational Improvement; Family (Sociological Unit); *Females; *Global Approach; Health Needs; Peace; Political Power; Population Trends; Publications; Sex Discrimination; *Social Action; *World Affairs
IDENTIFIERS *International Womens Year; *United Nations

ABSTRACT

This document is a condensed version of the World Plan of Action for the Decade of Women unanimously accepted at the United Nations' World Conference on International Women's Year in Mexico City. The Plan provides guidelines for meeting the objectives of the International Women's Year over a 10-year period. Goals to be attained at the end of five years are also listed. The section on national action guidelines deals with efforts toward peace, political action, education, employment, health, the family, population, housing, and other questions. Sections on research, the media, and international action are also presented. The document emphasizes the necessity for a periodic comprehensive review of the progress made toward these goals by the United Nations system. (HLM)

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ED127541

Decade for Women

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World Plan of Action

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The Plan of Action

The international community has, since the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945, repeatedly tried to reinforce the fundamental principles of human rights contained in that Charter, such as the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women.

In a succession of conventions, declarations and formal recommendations, it has expressed its growing awareness of the uneven development of peoples and the tragedy of all forms of discrimination. It has declared that all human beings without distinction have the right to enjoy the fruits of social and economic progress and should, for their part, contribute to it. It has condemned sex discrimination as fundamentally unjust, an offense against human dignity and an infringement of human rights. But despite these solemn pronouncements, the translation of these principles into practical reality has been slow and uneven.

History has attested to the active role that women have played, together with men, in accelerating the material and spiritual progress of peoples. In our times, women's role will increasingly emerge as a powerful revolutionary social force.

There are significant differences in the status of women from country to country, rooted in the cultural framework or tied to the level of development, as there are within a given country, according to the social category of women within it. Yet basic similarities unite women in the fight against differences wherever they exist in the legal, economic, social, political and cultural status of women and men.

In many countries women form a large part of the agricultural work force in addition to playing an important role in agricultural production and in the preparation, processing and marketing of food. They therefore constitute a substantial economic resource; yet their status in this sector is often disadvantaged.

Likewise, while industrialization provides jobs for women

and constitutes one of the main means for the integration of women in the process of development, women workers are disadvantaged because of the fact that the technological structure of production in general has been oriented toward man and his requirements.

During the last decades, millions of women acting together with other progressive forces have focused public opinion at the national and international levels on all these problems. The reality of the problems which women still meet in their daily life in many countries of the world prompted the United Nations to proclaim 1975 as International Women's Year. The objective of the Year was to define a society in which women participate in a real and full sense in economic, social and political life and to devise strategies whereby such societies could develop.

This Plan provides guidelines for national action over the ten-year period from 1975-1985 as part of a sustained, long-term effort to achieve the objectives of International Women's Year. It is addressed primarily to governments and to public and private institutions, women's and youth organizations, employers, trade unions, mass communications media, nongovernmental organizations, political parties and other groups.

There should be a clear commitment at all levels of government to take what action is necessary to implement the Plan. Governments should review their legislation affecting the status of women in the light of human rights principles and internationally accepted standards. Laws should be enacted or updated as needed to conform with the international conventions on the rights of women, and governments which have not already done so should move to ratify these conventions.

Nongovernmental women's organizations can work toward the goals of the Plan by starting, especially with the help of volunteer experts, institutions and projects for the welfare of women and by disseminating information for their advancement.

A 5-YEAR MINIMUM

By the end of the first five-year period (1975-1980), these minimum goals should be achieved:

– A marked increase in literacy and civic education of women,

especially in rural areas.
- Coeducational technical and vocational training extended to women and men in the industrial and agricultural sectors.
- Equal access to education at every level, compulsory primary education for all, and action taken to prevent school dropouts.
- Increased employment opportunities for women, reduction of unemployment and greater efforts to eliminate discrimination in the terms and conditions of employment.
- Equal eligibility to vote and to seek elected office.
- Greater participation of women in policymaking positions at the local, national and international levels.
- Increased provision for health education, sanitation, nutrition, family education, family planning and other welfare services.
- Recognition of the economic value of women's work in the home, in domestic food production and marketing and voluntary activities not traditionally remunerated.
- Direction of formal, nonformal and lifelong education toward the reevaluation of man and woman, in order to ensure their full realization as an individual in the family and in society.

National Action

TOWARD PEACE

An essential condition for maintaining and strengthening international cooperation and peace is the protection of human rights among and within nations. In order to involve more women in this endeavor, the peace efforts of women as individuals and in groups should be recognized and encouraged.

The free flow of information and ideas among countries should be facilitated, and exchange visits between women of different countries to study common problems promoted.

Women and men should be encouraged to instill in their children the values of mutual respect and understanding for all nations and peoples, racial equality, sexual equality, the right of every nation to self-determination and the desire to maintain international cooperation, peace and security in the world.

POLITICAL ACTION

Despite the fact that women make up half the world's population, in the vast majority of nations only a small percentage of women hold leadership positions in government. Consequently, women are not involved in the decision-making and their views and needs are often overlooked in government planning.

Many women also lack the education, training, civic awareness and self-confidence to participate effectively in political life—participation as voters, lobbyists, elected representatives, trade unionists and public officials in all branches of government including the judiciary. Where special qualifications for holding public office are required, they should apply to both sexes equally.

Governments should establish goals, strategies and timetables for increasing within the decade 1975-1985 the number of women in elective and appointive public offices. Special efforts in this direction could include:

- Reaffirming and publicizing official government policy concerning equal political participation by women.
- Issuing special governmental instructions for achieving equitable representation of women in public office, then compiling periodic progress reports.
- Making a special effort to recruit, nominate and promote women, especially to fill important positions, until fair representation of the sexes is achieved.

EDUCATION

Access to education is not only a basic human right; it is a key to social progress. Illiteracy and lack of education and training in basic skills contribute to the vicious circle of underdevelopment, low productivity and poor conditions of health and welfare. In a great many countries illiteracy is much more widespread among women than among men, and the rates higher in rural than in urban areas.

In most countries female enrollment at all levels of education is considerably below that of men. Girls tend to drop out of school earlier than boys, and boys are given precedence over girls when parents have to make a choice if education is not free. There is often discrimination in the nature and con-

tent of the education provided and in the options offered. Girls' choices of areas of study are dominated by conventional attitudes toward the roles of men and women in society.

As long as women remain illiterate and are subject to discrimination in education and training, the motivation for change so badly needed to improve the quality of life will fail—for in most societies it is the mother who is responsible for the training of her children during their formative years.

Governments should provide equal opportunities for both sexes at all levels of education and training within the context of lifelong education, and on a formal and nonformal basis, according to national needs. Target dates should be set for the eradication of illiteracy, and governments should be joined in this effort by social institutions, such as cooperatives and voluntary organizations.

Free and compulsory primary education should be provided without discrimination for girls and boys. Where possible, textbooks, school lunches, transport and other essentials should be provided free of charge.

Textbooks and other teaching materials should be reevaluated and, where necessary, rewritten to ensure that they reflect an image of women in positive and participatory roles in society. Research should be carried out to identify discriminatory practices in education and new teaching techniques to correct them encouraged.

Vocational programs of all types should be equally accessible to both sexes so that girls and boys will have a wide choice of employment opportunities. Both sexes should have equal opportunities to receive scholarships and study grants.

Special measures should be developed to help women who wish to return to work after a long absence, owing in particular to family responsibilities. Multipurpose training centers could be established in rural and urban areas to provide education and training in various disciplines and to encourage a self-reliant approach to life.

Girls and boys alike should be encouraged through vocational and career guidance programs to choose a career according to their real aptitudes rather than on the basis of deeply ingrained sex stereotypes. They should also be made aware of the education and training required to take full advantage of the employment opportunities available.

EMPLOYMENT

This Plan seeks to achieve equal opportunity and treatment for women workers and their integration in the work force in accordance with the accepted international standards recognizing the right to work, to equal pay for equal work, to equal conditions of work and to advancement.

Available data show that women constitute more than a third of the world's economically active population; approximately 46 percent of the women between 15 and 64 years old are in the labor force. Yet the vast majority of women are concentrated in a limited number of occupations at lower levels of skill, responsibility and pay. Women frequently experience discrimination in pay, promotion, working conditions and hiring practices, and, even where policies of nondiscrimination are in effect, cultural constraints and family responsibilities further restrict their chances for employment.

Governments should formulate policies expressly directed toward equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers and the guarantee of their right to equal pay for equal work. Special efforts should be made to foster positive attitudes toward the employment of women, irrespective of marital status, among employers and in society at large, and to eliminate obstacles based on sex-typed divisions of labor.

Governments should seek new sources of self-help activities, such as training programs in community development and entrepreneurial skills, which should be open equally to both sexes.

In order to extend women's range of economic roles, cooperatives and small-scale industries could be developed and encouraged with government support. Cooperatives should be organized, especially in areas where women play a major role, such as food production, marketing, housing, nutrition and health. Cooperatives may also be the most appropriate and feasible arrangement for child-care and could provide employment opportunities as well. Essential to the success of such cooperative ventures, however, are training and access to credit and seed capital.

Specific target dates should be established for achieving a substantial increase in the number of qualified women employed in skilled and technical work. Special efforts should

also be made to increase the number of women in management and policymaking positions in commerce, industry and trade. Discriminatory treatment of women in national social security schemes should be eliminated to the maximum possible extent.

Trade unions should adopt policies to increase the participation of women in their work at every level. They should have special programs to promote equality of opportunity, including leadership training for women.

HEALTH

Improved access to health, nutrition and other social services is essential to the full participation of women in development activities, to the strengthening of family life and to a general improvement in the quality of life.

Comprehensive simple community health services could be developed in which the community identifies its own health needs, takes part in decisions on delivery of health care in different socio-economic contexts and develops primary health care services that are easily accessible to every member of the community. Women themselves, especially in rural areas, should be encouraged through adequate training programs to provide such health care services to their communities. Provision should be made to ensure that women shall have the same access to that care as men.

Improved, easily accessible and safe water supplies, sewage disposal and other sanitation measures should be provided both to improve health conditions of families and to reduce the burden of carrying water, which falls mainly on women and children.

Governments should pay particular attention to women's special health needs, by providing prenatal and postnatal and delivery services, gynecological and family planning services during the reproductive years, comprehensive health services to all infants, preschool children and schoolchildren without prejudice on grounds of sex, specific care for preadolescent and adolescent girls and for the postreproductive years and old age, and research into the special health problems of women.

Programs should be formulated for the reduction of infant,

child and maternal mortality by means of improved nutrition, sanitation, maternal and child health care and maternal education. Education programs should be developed to overcome prejudices, taboos and superstitions that prevent women from using existing facilities.

A massive program of health education and services could be organized in rural and urban neighborhoods, and women should be actively encouraged to participate.

Because women are important not only as users but as providers of health care, steps should be taken to incorporate them as fully informed and active participants in the health planning and decision-making process at all levels. Women should also be trained as paramedics and encouraged to organize health cooperatives and self-help programs. Women should have the same right of access as men to any training establishment or course for any health profession and to continue to the highest levels.

THE FAMILY

In the total development process the role of women, along with men, needs to be considered in terms of their contribution to the family as well as to the society and the national economy. Higher status for the role in the home—as a parent, spouse and homemaker—can only enhance the personal dignity of a man and a woman. Household activities that are necessary for family life have generally been perceived as having low economic value and prestige. All societies should, however, place a higher value on these activities, if they wish the family group to be maintained and to fulfill its basic functions of the procreation and education of children.

The family is also an important agent of social, political and cultural change. If women are to enjoy equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities, and contribute on equal terms with men to the development process, the functions and roles traditionally allotted to each sex within the family will require continual reexamination and reassessment in light of changing conditions.

The rights of women in all the various forms of the family, including the nuclear family, the extended family, consensual union and the single-parent family, should be protected by appropriate legislation and policy.

Legislation relating to marriage should be in conformity with international standards. In particular it should ensure that women and men shall have the same right to free choice of a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent.

Legislative and other measures should be taken to ensure that men and women shall enjoy full and equal legal capacity relating to their personal and property rights, including the right to acquire, administer, enjoy, dispose of and inherit property (including property acquired during marriage). During marriage the principle of equal rights and responsibilities would mean that both partners should perform an active role in the home, and share jointly decision-making on matters affecting the family and children. At the dissolution of marriage, this principle would imply that procedures and grounds of dissolution of marriage should be liberalized and apply equally to both spouses; assets acquired during marriage should be shared on an equitable basis; appropriate provisions should be made for the social security and pension coverage of the work contributed by the homemaker; and decisions relating to the custody of children should be taken in consideration of their best interests.

In recognition of the growing number of single-parent families, additional assistance and benefits, wherever possible, should be provided for them. The unmarried mother should be granted full-fledged status as a parent, and children born out of wedlock should have the same rights and obligations as children born in wedlock.

POPULATION

The status of women and, in particular, their educational level, whether or not they are gainfully employed, the nature of their employment and their position within the family are all factors that have been found to influence family size. Conversely, the right of women to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information and means to enable them to exercise that right has a decisive impact on their ability to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities and to participate fully in community life as responsible citizens.

The hazards of childbearing, characterized by too many

pregnancies, pregnancies at too early or too late an age and at too close intervals, inadequate maternity care and resort to illegally-induced abortions, result in high rates of maternal mortality or maternal-related morbidity. Where levels of infant and early childhood mortality are high, their reduction – a desirable end in itself – may also be a prerequisite of the limitation of the number of pregnancies that the average woman will experience, and of the society's adoption of a smaller ideal family size where this is a desired goal. Fewer pregnancies may be more easily achieved when there is a reasonable expectation that children born will survive to adulthood.

In some parts of the world, young women constitute the major component in the rural-to-urban migratory stream caused by urbanization. Such selective migration results in sex imbalances in both the urban and rural populations which can be detrimental to individual and family welfare. Just over half of the total female population of the world currently resides in rural areas of developing countries – the particular demographic, social and economic problems of these areas require special development efforts.

While nations have a sovereign right to determine their own population policies, individuals and couples should have access, through an institutionalized system, to the information and means that will enable them to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to overcome sterility. All legal, social or financial obstacles to the dissemination of family planning knowledge, means and services should be removed.

HOUSING

The majority of women still spend more of their time in and around the house than do men; therefore, the improvement of the house, its related facilities and its neighborhood will bring about a direct improvement in the daily lives of women. In addition to the considerations of health and comfort, well-designed and suitably furnished houses offer comparative relief from monotony and drudgery, making easier the pursuit of other interests and bringing women's lives closer to the demands of human dignity.

The design of the house should take into account the needs of the entire family, especially the women and children.

Use of the following should be encouraged:

1: building materials that require minimal or no maintenance;
2: equipment and appliances that do not present safety hazards;
3: labor-saving interior finishes and surfaces conducive to comfort and hygiene;
4: furniture that is movable, storable and easily replaceable.

Neighborhood planning should provide for services and facilities that respond to the expressed needs of women, reducing labor and travel for vital needs such as water, food and fuel. Accessibility of neighborhood centers for the women and children should be considered in the design of networks of neighborhoods. Training and orientation courses should be organized in the use of new facilities made available to women, as well as in various aspects of home ownership and maintenance.

OTHER QUESTIONS

Women are usually affected to a greater extent than men by the social problems caused by rapid modernization and industrialization. Social services play a crucial role in anticipating these problems and in reducing the need for remedial action at a later stage. Governments should therefore encourage the development of social services as a useful tool in mobilizing human and technical resources for the benefit of all marginal and social groups.

Special efforts should be made to provide for the needs of migrant women and for women workers and their families who live in urban slums and squatter settlements. Training, job counseling, child-care facilities, financial aid and, where necessary, language training should be provided. Special attention should also be given to elderly women, many of whom are indigent and who frequently receive less protection and assistance than men.

Special attention should also be paid to female criminality, which is increasing in many parts of the world, and to the rehabilitation of female offenders, including juvenile delinquents and recidivists. Research in this field should include study of the relationship between female criminality and other social problems brought about by rapid social change. Special legislative and other measures should be taken to combat prostitution and the illicit traffic in women, especially young girls.

Research

A major difficulty in assessing the economic contribution of women at the present time is the lack of data. Many women are automatically excluded from the economically active population in national statistics because they are homemakers only, and homemaking is nowhere considered to be an economic activity. Another large group of women are erroneously classified as homemakers only because it is assumed that women have no economic activity and their status is therefore not carefully investigated. This occurs particularly in relation to women who, in addition to their homemaking activities, are also self-employed handicraft and other home industry workers or unpaid workers in subsistence agriculture. Further, statistics on unemployment often present an inaccurate picture of the situation because they omit women who are not recognized as part of the economically active population (for example, those classified as housewives). These women may, however, in fact be in need of work and available for employment.

Among other data biased by preconceptions are those on heads of households or families, when it is assumed that a woman can be the head only in the absence of a man. Many households actually headed by women are therefore erroneously classified as having male heads.

A scientific and reliable data base should be established and suitable indicators developed which are sensitive to the particular situation and needs of women as an integral part of national and international programs of statistics. All census and survey data relating to characteristics of individuals and to household and family composition should be reported and analyzed by sex.

In the collection of such data, special efforts should be made to measure:

1: the participation of women in local and national planning and policymaking in all sectors of national life;
2: the extent of women's activities in food production, water and fuel supply, marketing and transportation;
3: the economic and social contribution of housework, handicrafts and other home-based economic activities;
4: the effect on the national economy of women's activities as

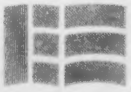
consumers of goods and services; and

5: the quality of life (for example, job satisfaction, income situation, family characteristics and use of leisure time).

This Plan gives high priority to cross-cultural studies, especially of the causes of discriminatory customs, practices, attitudes and beliefs, which impede women's contribution to the development process, and of the mechanisms of change.

The wide exchange of information and research findings should be promoted and maximum use made of existing national and regional research institutes and universities, including the United Nations University. A network of such institutes and universities should be built up to facilitate the regular exchange of information and knowledge in cooperation with the United Nations.

The Media



A major obstacle in improving the status of women lies in public attitudes and values regarding women's roles in society. The mass communication media have great potential as a vehicle for social change and could exercise a significant influence in helping to remove prejudices and stereotypes, accelerating the acceptance of women's new and expanding roles in society and promoting their integration into the development process as equal partners.

Mass communication media should be understood as encompassing not only the modern radio, television, cinema and press but also the traditional forms of entertainment such as drama, storytelling, songs and puppet shows which are essential for reaching the rural areas of many countries.

Governmental and nongovernmental organizations should encourage research to determine the image of women and men portrayed by the media, and the negative and positive influences exercised by them. These organizations should also take steps to ensure that information shall be provided on the current situation of women in various countries, with particular emphasis on the changing roles of both sexes.

Those in control of the media should seek to raise the public consciousness with respect to these changing roles. They

should be urged to project a more dynamic image of women and to take into account the diversity of women's roles and their actual and potential contribution to society.

They should depict the roles and achievements of women from all walks of life throughout history, including women in the rural areas and from minority groups. They should also seek to develop in women confidence in themselves and in other women and a sense of their own value and importance as human beings.

Women should be appointed in greater numbers in media management, decision-making and other capacities as editors, columnists, reporters, producers and the like, and should encourage the critical review, within the media, of the image of women projected.

International Action

The United Nations has proclaimed 1976-1985 the Decade for Women. The Decade and this Plan call for a clear commitment on the part of the international community to accord importance and priority to measures to improve the situation of women, both as a means of achieving the goals of social progress and development and as an end in itself. The Plan envisages that all organizations of the United Nations system should take separate and joint action to implement its recommendations. Each organization should evaluate what it has done to improve the status of women and enhance their contribution to development and identify the measures needed to implement this Plan.

International nongovernmental organizations and their national affiliates should act jointly and separately, within their particular spheres of interest, to give effect to the recommendations of the Plan within the ten-year period.

Women should be fully involved in policymaking at the international level as well as the national. Governments should make sure that they are equitably represented among the

principal delegates to all international bodies, conferences and committees, including those dealing with political and legal questions, economic and social development, disarmament, administration and finance, science and technology, environment and population. The secretariats of the international organizations should set an example by eliminating any provisions or practices in their employment policies that may be discriminatory against women.

The exchange of information and experience at the international level is an effective means of stimulating progress and encouraging the adoption of measures to eliminate discrimination against women and encourage their wider participation in all sectors of national life.

International organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, should strengthen their efforts to distribute information on women and related matters. Material documenting the situation of women in specific countries of the world should be prepared and distributed, as well as material on methods and techniques that have proved useful in promoting the status of women and integrating them into the process of development.

Review

A comprehensive and thorough review and appraisal of progress made in meeting the goals of this Plan should be undertaken at regular intervals by the United Nations system. As a specialized UN activity, relevant trends and policies relating to women should be monitored continuously.

The Plan of Action should also be considered at the meetings of the relevant UN specialized agencies and other intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. The results of these discussions should be submitted to the UN Economic and Social Council and its relevant commissions, such as the Commission on the Status of Women or the Population Commission at their sessions in 1976 and 1977. An item on action toward implementation of the Plan should be included in the agenda of the sessions of all these bodies at intervals of no more than two years. National governments are encouraged to undertake their own regular review and appraisal of progress made toward achieving the goals of the Plan.

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This is a condensed version of the World Plan, published and distributed by the Women's Equity Action League Educational and Legal Defense Fund (WEAL Fund), National Press Building, Washington, D.C. 20045, under a grant from John D. Rockefeller, 3rd. The full text of the World Plan of Action and related resolutions adopted at Mexico City in July 1975 by the United Nations World Conference of the International Women's Year can be obtained from the United Nations or from the US Department of State.

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